

VZCZCXYZ0001
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHUL #1527/01 2140810
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 010810Z AUG 08
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1082
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 4579
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 4704
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CHJUSMAGK SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMUSFK SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC//J-5// PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC//OSD/ISA/EAP// PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 001527

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/31/2018
TAGS: [PBTS](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [KS](#) [KN](#) [JA](#)
SUBJECT: FM YU PLEASED WITH SUMMIT PREP, SAYS "ALL'S WELL
THAT ENDS WELL" ON LIANCOURT ROCKS

Classified By: AMB. ALEXANDER VERSHBOW. REASONS 1.4 (b/d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) On July 31 Ambassador Vershbow paid an office call on Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan to confer on preparations for President Bush's August 5-6 visit to the Republic of Korea (ROK). During their meeting they agreed that plans for the visit were proceeding smoothly and reviewed the most likely topics of discussion by the two presidents -- North Korea, FTA, Iraq and Afghanistan. Yu said he anticipated no problems on the North Korea message, said he had urged the ruling Grand National Party's (GNP) chief policymaker to move FTA ratification forward in the National Assembly without linking it to U.S. Congressional action, and revealed that an extension of ROK forces in Iraq could be possible because of the GNP's large majority. Yu predicted that some protests would occur during the President's visit, but assured the Ambassador they would be relatively small and manageable.

¶2. (C) In front of the press, the Ambassador expressed satisfaction that the controversial change to the website of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN) had been reversed at President Bush's direction, and noted our regret at the misunderstanding it had caused even though U.S. policy on the Liancourt Rocks had not changed. After the departure of the press, the Ambassador urged MOFAT to caution the Korean media against over-interpreting the U.S. action as recognition of Korea's sovereignty claim. Yu welcomed the BGN's actions to restore the previous wording on its website, but requested that the site's map of the islands also be changed back to listing all three names -- Dokdo, Takeshima and Liancourt Rocks. With obviously relief, Minister Yu summed up the issue by saying: "All's well that ends well." (Privately, he told the Ambassador that he was no longer expected to be fired over the website imbroglio).

¶3. (C) When the Ambassador mentioned the U.S. planned to include reference to a new U.S. embassy in the summit Joint Statement, FM Yu replied that he truly believed the Camp Coiner site would turn out to be an ideal location for the NEC and promised he would personally speak to the Culture Minister about our concerns regarding the cultural properties survey process. END SUMMARY.

14. (C) Ambassador Vershbow paid a call on Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan on July 31 to confer on preparations for President Bush's August 5-6 visit to Korea. The Ambassador and FM Yu both agreed that plans for the visit were proceeding smoothly. Asked about the prospects for protests during the President's visit, FM Yu explained that one of the now weekly anti-U.S. beef protests was scheduled to take place on August 2, before the President arrived, and that another planned demonstration would be held during the visit on August 5. However he assured the Ambassador that both were expected to draw smaller numbers than had been the case earlier in the summer. He said it was also possible that even smaller numbers of demonstrators would gather near the K-16 air field and the Hyatt Hotel during the President's arrival, but that a pro-U.S. counter demonstration was also being planned to welcome President Bush to Korea. With a smile, he suggested the Ambassador tell the President that such demonstrations were a sign of the ROK's vibrant democracy.

Review of Likely Agenda Items

15. (C) The Ambassador and FM Yu verbally went over the points contained in the latest draft of the Joint Statement for the August 5 summit with no serious conflicting views on the content. They also reviewed the most likely topics for the summit meeting.

-- North Korea: The Ambassador said he expected there would be considerable discussion of the North Korean nuclear issue, given the approaching August 11 deadline for the verification protocol and the need to move ahead with phase three dismantlement. Agreeing that verification of the North Korean declaration was now the key area of focus, Yu stressed that he had twice made that point to DPRK Foreign Minister Pak at the Six-Party Foreign Minister's meeting, but that he did not think that Pak truly understood what was required of North Korea. Asked if perhaps Minister Pak had deliberately played dumb by stressing the DPRK's call for inspections of all Six-Party member states, FM Yu said that he was sincerely worried that Pak really didn't understand that verification meant verification of the North Korean declaration, and not verification of any other facilities outside of the DPRK.

-- FTA: FM Yu and the Ambassador agreed it would be useful for President Bush and President Lee to compare strategies for achieving ratification of the FTA. Yu said he had met earlier in the day with the ruling Grand National Party (GNP) chief policymaker Lim Tae-hee, and had told him that the GNP should move forward on ratification of the FTA by the National Assembly without linking it to U.S. Congressional action.

-- Iraq and Afghanistan: The Ambassador said that we did not see the summit as the time for any discussions on Iraq or Afghanistan, but that the President would likely be interested to hear President Lee's thoughts on the prospects for additional ROK involvement in those countries. FM Yu replied that thought that the ROKG and GNP could work out an extension of the ROK troop presence in Iraq later this year, provided Washington and other coalition partners believed there was still a need for the troops. He said the Foreign Ministry was also working to expand ROK vocational training activities in Afghanistan, but when asked about sending police trainers, FM Yu repeated MOFAT's preference to conduct the police training in Seoul. He revealed that one of the reasons for the ROK position on this was that the Taliban had sent MOFAT a threatening message stating that if the ROK sent uniformed police trainers to Afghanistan, they would be in violation of the agreement they had reached during last summer's Korean hostage crisis, and Koreans would therefore be targeted. The Ambassador noted the drawbacks of training outside Afghanistan, and suggested the ROK consider employing

civilian or retired police personnel for the job.

All's Well That Ends Well on Liancourt Rocks

¶16. (C) The Ambassador used the first part of the meeting with the Foreign Minister to address the issue that had arisen over the past week regarding the Dokdo/Takeshima (Liancourt Rocks) island dispute. With the media present, the Ambassador expressed satisfaction that the controversial change to the website of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN) had been reversed at President Bush's direction, and noted our regret at the misunderstanding it had caused even though U.S. policy on the Liancourt Rocks had not changed. Following the departure of the media, the Ambassador said the BGN would undertake a comprehensive review of the website in order to standardize, correct and provide additional needed information on all the disputed territories it lists around the world. He assured the Foreign Minister that the problem had been caused by a technical mistake that did not in fact represent a change in U.S. policy. FM Yu thanked the Ambassador for the news. He described his days as "grueling" because of the issue, noting that it had caught him by surprise. He said that the ROK Ambassador to the United States had likewise been put in a very awkward position. Yu said he had quickly recognized it was a technical problem, rather than a policy change, but that it had been very hard for him to explain to the Korean press why the change in the website had only been made with regard to Korea's territorial dispute with Japan, and why that change had been made at that particular time. He noted that one additional correction was needed. He showed the Ambassador a printout of a map from the BGN website that showed the islands as having two alternate names -- Takeshima and Liancourt Rocks -- but that it no longer showed the Korean alternate name of Dokdo (or Tokdo) as it previously had. The Ambassador assured him that he would convey the minister's request to Washington that the BGN immediately restore the Korean name to that map.

¶17. (C) The Ambassador expressed serious concern that Yonhap and other Korean media outlets had misrepresented the corrective actions being taken by the BGN as acknowledgment by the USG of South Korea's claims of sovereignty over the islands. Noting that even the content of Blue House statements were being mis-reported by Yonhap, he urged that MOFAT explain to the press that the U.S. policy stance on the sovereignty issue remained the same as it has been since ¶1952. He also pointed out that the content of other Korean news stories and editorials that claimed the U.S. had ordered the BGN to make the change in its website as retaliation for opposition to U.S. beef imports to Korea, or because the Japanese Government had asked us to do so, were nothing more than conspiracy theories entirely without merit. Yu replied that the Ambassador was right and promised that MOFAT would address those points with the Korean media. He was, however, unwilling to entirely discount Japan's influence on the matter, claiming he knew that the Japanese Government had been in contact with the BGN to try and get them to change "East Sea" to "Sea of Japan."

¶18. (C) At the conclusion of their discussion, Yu thanked the Ambassador for his help, commenting that he was very pleased that the problem had been resolved, adding the phrase: "All's Well That Ends Well." The Ambassador stated that he hoped that resolution of the problem would help to clear the way for a good summit meeting between President Bush and President Lee on August 6, a view the Foreign Minister clearly shared. After the meeting, the Ambassador asked FM Yu, who was reportedly slated to be fired because of the website imbroglio, whether he was now likely to survive and Yu responded affirmatively.

Promise to Speed Up New U.S. Embassy Project

¶19. (C) When the Ambassador mentioned that the U.S. wanted to

include mention of a new U.S. embassy in the summit Joint Statement, FM Yu replied that he truly believed the Camp Coiner site would turn out to be an ideal location because the Seoul City Government planned to significantly upgrade the surrounding area. Informed of our concern that the ROKG request to survey the site for cultural properties might once again thwart our efforts to secure a new facility if something of historic value were to be found, Yu said that he would work to speed up the survey process and that he would personally discuss ways to alleviate our concern with the Minister of Culture.

VERSHBOW